

26 MAY 1978

ARTICLE APPEARED
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Torrijos Target Of Plot?

Report Hints At U.S.

Plan Of Assassination

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Church of Scientology officials made a secret government report public Thursday which suggested the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration once discussed assassinating Panama's leader, Gen. Omar Torrijos.

The assassination plot was discussed briefly in the Justice Department's "Defeo Report," an investigation made by criminal investigator Michael A. Defeo alleging misconduct by government officials. The church released 31 pages of the report and said they were being made public for the first time.

A section of the report entitled "alleged assassination plot in Panama" said, "The Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations inquired into reports that Philip Smith (the DEA's acting chief) and William Durkin (the DEA's assistant administrator for enforcement) participated in discussions within DEA regarding a proposal to assassinate the president of Panama, who was suspected of being involved in drug trafficking."

The report said, "Smith stated that he had not participated in any such discussions but had developed information of a plot to kill General Torrijos."

"Smith testified that this information was quickly passed on to the CIA for transmittal to the Republic of Panama."

"Smith said he was later informed that the plot had been verified and neutralized," the document said.

The document also said there were allegations that discussions took place within DEA about "the possibility of killing a Mr. (Manuel) Noriega, the principal assistant to the president of Panama and that Smith and William Durkin actually proposed that he be killed."

According to a church spokesman, there are only three copies of the Defeo report and they are labeled top secret. The spokesman said the church obtained the report "from confidential sources."

A government official said the charges, stemming back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, were aired at closed hearings during the Senate debate on the Panama Canal treaties.

"This all went public during the Panama debate," a DEA spokesman said.

The spokesman said that in January 1972, the director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the DEA's predecessor agency, discussed a variety of options for ending the flow of narcotics through Panama and into the United States.

The BNDD staff came up with a variety of options, the spokesman said, including "the total and complete immobilization" of the head of Panama's secret police.

Added the spokesman: "all of the options were rejected."

The church and the government have been involved in an increasingly bitter feud since July 3, 1977, when, in one of its largest raids, 134 FBI agents raided the church's offices in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., carting away thousands of documents.

The government maintains many of the documents were taken illegally from government files by Scientologists who infiltrated a variety of government agencies.

A federal grand jury has been investigating the controversial church.

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Smith, Philip

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(Drug Enforcement
Administration)